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ABSTRACT

In an effort to establish a quality middle grades teacher education program that would be responsive to local needs, the Middle Grades Education (MGE) faculty at Georgia's Valdosta State University implemented Reality 401, a field based program, in Fall 1992. The program is a senior year teacher education program designed to provide a collaborative training base with public school facilities and to improve the quality of teacher preparation through the implementation of extensive field experience. The first and second quarters of the senior year consist of three blocked courses each and intensive field experience, while the third quarter is reserved for student teaching. In the first quarter of implementation, both instruction and field experience were conducted at a local middle school, but due to scheduling conflicts, students began taking classes at the college 2 days a week. The middle grades major at the University now involves 105 quarter hours of course work with approximately 470 clock hours of field experience, in addition to the 10-week student teaching component. After the program's first year, a field experience handbook was developed to improve communication between mentors and preservice teachers. Appendixes include a sample form for a mid-quarter professionalism report and selected comments from a 1993 survey of mentors and preservice teachers. (TGI)

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AN INTENSE PRESERVICE FIELD BASED PROGRAM
for
MIDDLE GRADES EDUCATION

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REALITY 401:

AN INTENSE PRESERVICE FIELD BASED PROGRAM

for

MIDDLE GRADES EDUCATION

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Abstract
Given the reality of the broader mission of schools, it becomes obvious that the knowledge and skills which teachers must possess have changed. So, a quality middle grades undergraduate program was designed to be responsive to the needs of the people and organizations of South Georgia. Furthermore, the program provides a collaborative training base with public school faculties. This program involves university faculty, preservice teachers and public school staffs, students and parents. Reality 401, a senior year partnership, is a joint effort of the Middle Grades Education (MGE) faculty, public school faculties, and MGE seniors. The focus of this paper will be a discussion of the development, implementation and evaluation of the field based program, Reality 401.

Background
Many administrators find that new teachers trained in current pedagogy adopt the lecture, workbook teaching methods within a few months of beginning their careers. New teachers apparently leave college not owning the new pedagogy recommended for middle graders, or it may be that first year teachers face a host of problems that include disillusionment and frustration (Calliari, 1990). Their energy is therefore diverted away from instruction. The comment "I had no idea that teaching was so demanding" is heard time and again. Because of this dilemma, the Middle Grades Education (MGE) faculty at Valdosta State decided to revise the undergraduate program to address the problem.

The Departmental plan is to immerse seniors in the middle school philosophy and practices. They are empowered to take charge of their education and development as a middle school teacher. A significant amount of the students' education is in the field with master teachers (mentors) who have volunteered to work with preservice teachers. Each student is assigned a mentor and a team with which to work. In addition, each student has a MGE faculty supervisor who observes him or her in the field a minimum of three times during the quarter. All data collected from the field experience is kept in the student's portfolio. In doing this, the MGE faculty is "practicing what we preach" by implementing an alternative assessment for the evaluation of students.

The pre-1992 program had field experience associated with the method courses. For example, two weeks of field experience were connected with each block of classes: language arts and social studies methods and math and science methods. Students completed four weeks of field experience plus September field experience before student teaching. The 10 week student teaching experience involved students getting to know the cooperating teacher, students, and school environment. They gradually got the teaching responsibility for the full day. Two weeks of solo teaching was completed during this time. The faculty believed that the students needed more time in the classroom so preservice teachers could gain the confidence and ownership of middle grades pedagogy needed to be successful.

Development
A revised senior year program was developed focusing on a field based plan. The MGE field experience is defined as the groundwork for student teaching. It is the period of time in the preservice teachers' program when the potential educator begins to close the gap between theory and practice. It is a period of introduction to the middle school environment and a period of guided practice working with middle grades students and faculty. The field experience involves three phases: observation, participation, and teaching.

Reality 401 consisted of the first quarter; three courses blocked together and intense field experiences would be involved. The second quarter of senior year involved three more classes and intense field experiences. Student teaching would be completed third quarter. The plan was presented to the Dean of Education. He liked the idea and encouraged the faculty to proceed. The principal of a local middle school was contacted to see if he would be interested in the program. He agreed and permission of the superintendent was gained.

In the fall of 1992 the first senior year program began. Both instruction and field experience were conducted at a local middle school. Twelve preservice teachers were assigned to mentors for the entire school year. MGE faculty taught the college classes at the school for three hours a day. Three hours a day the preservice teachers were in public school classrooms working with mentors and students.

The major problem encountered fall quarter concerned scheduling. Some preservice teachers missed team planning time because of college courses and some missed working with students for the same reason. So, Winter Quarter of 1993, the seniors worked in the classroom Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and attended college classes Thursday and Friday. Communication among MGE faculty and mentors was found to be important to the success of the program. Spring Quarter of 1993, these twelve students completed their student teaching. The vice principal of the school commented "these students are more confident and knowledgeable about the school environment than students in the past."

Now, the middle grades major component of the program has 105 quarter hours of course work with approximately 470 clock hours of field experience besides the culminating 10 week student teaching component. For example field experience before senior year includes:

PSY 310 - Educational Psychology	20 hours
SPE 360 - Exceptional Children	20 hours
MGE 301 - Nature & Needs of Middle Level Student	20 hours
September field experience	2 weeks all day

Senior year includes a minimum of 20 field days for each of the two quarters. Preservice teachers follow the same schedule as a classroom teacher. For example preservice teachers report at 8 a.m. and leave at 4:30 p.m. just as the regular faculty.

Preservice teachers also have two days during which they become middle graders for a day. The best schedule for this activity is for preservice teachers to be a student for a day in their assigned school. They are assigned to a student and go through the day as that student's side kick. At the end of the quarter, they are a student for a day in another middle school. The same procedure is followed. Preservice teachers write thank you letters to their side kick. Several special relationships have started because of this routine. Preservice teachers learn to respect and appreciate the middle graders after walking in their shoes for a day. This experience is valuable for all.

After the first year, a field experience handbook was developed to improve communication. It includes the following sections: overview and responsibilities of all involved, mentor sections, and preservice teachers' section. The mentor section contains assessment forms to be used during the quarter and suggestions for working with the preservice teacher. The preservice teachers' section contains examples of the lesson plan format to be used, log and sign in sheet to be completed. See **Appendix** 1 for an example of the mid-quarter report that is completed by the mentor concerning the preservice teacher's professionalism.

The scheduled established for the second year of this program was preservice teachers attended block courses Monday and Tuesday then worked in the schools Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Both mentors and preservice teachers stated that this scheduled was awkward. One reason was that the preservice teachers did not see the beginning of units started Monday. Mentors had to spent time bringing preservice teachers up to speed. Friday for many classes is test day and down time. Preservice teachers believed they needed more experience in beginning the week's activities. Therefore, Winter Quarter the schedule was changed to preservice teachers

working in the schools Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and attending senior block classes Thursday and Friday. One week each quarter students are in the schools the full week and are responsible for planning, teaching, and evaluating two class periods. The second quarter they are in the schools for a full week and are responsible for planning, teaching, and evaluating three class periods. Then they are ready for ten weeks of student teaching. We expect these students to be responsible for teaching all periods for eight weeks with 2 weeks of solo teaching without the teacher in the room.

Evaluation of the program

Several instruments used for evaluation are mentors reports, mentor interviews, preservice teachers' interviews, self report of confidence concerning classroom management, supervisors' evaluations, preservice teachers' lesson plans, assessment of mentor teams by preservice teachers, and, in the future, senior portfolios. During Fall Quarter of 1993, a graduate assistant interviewed mentors and preservice teachers. He asked what they liked about the program and how it could be improved. A sample of positive and negative responses from both mentors and preservice teachers is found in **Appendix 2**.

School Sites

Ten sites are used for senior year experience. These schools were selected as the result of their interest in working with the program, of their having strong mentors, and of their location. Two schools, Lowndes Middle School and Lanier Middle School, have gone out of their way to work with the program. Mentors who have worked with the program for over a year have asked for training and more information in the handbook. They also asked to be evaluated concerning their mentoring attributes. These mentors and teams received no compensation for this partnership. A certificate of appreciation is given to each lead mentor each quarter.

Summary

The motto of the department is "Partners Transforming Education For Tomorrow." The middle school philosophy is active learning with the student as the focal point of the education process. Thus, the program is field-based providing the students with a hands-on learning experience. Knowledge and skills are introduced, modeled, and practiced in all MGE courses. Students are required to apply their knowledge and skills while working with middle grades students. A focus of the preparation program is that students are trained to be team members. Cooperative planning within the department and with other departments is necessary for providing the students with a comprehensive view of education. Each senior block has a faculty member serving as team leader similar to teams in the middle school. There are three senior block options students can select to enter.

The Middle Grades Education Department of Valdosta State University provides an exciting innovative preservice program for its students. Dean F. D. Toth, supporting departments, local school systems, and the middle grades faculty work together to meet the challenge of providing excellent teachers for the future. The Middle Grades Education Department is meeting needs of preservice teachers, school systems, and communities with a program based upon the concept of partners transforming education for tomorrow.

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APPENDIX 1

MIDDLE GRADES EDUCATION SENIOR FIELD BASE PROGRAM
Mid-Quarter Professionalism Report

Preservice Teacher's Name _____ Date_____

Mentor's Name_____

School_____

Rate the student by checking the space most indicative of the student's professional behavior. You may comment on any rating that you have assigned. Some items need the team's input. Please be as accurate as possible in your assessment. Discuss report with preservice teacher before signing and dating. Have preservice teacher sign.

Attributes The student:	Always	Some-times	Seldom	Never
reports to school on time				
stays the assigned time				
has a sense of responsibility for all teaching assignments				
is prepared for assignments				
has a positive work ethic				
is enthusiastic				
dresses professionally				
works effectively as member of a teaching team both in the classroom and in the school				
models proper behavior and grammar				
appears confident				
is assertive				
has classroom management knowledge				
gets involved with students professionally				
respects students				

Comments:

Preservice Teacher's Signature_____

Mentor's Signature_____

Date_____

APPENDIX 2

Positive	Negative
More time in school based education means better prepared teachers.	Loss of students on Monday and Tuesdays causes continuity problems.
The time spent "student teaching" is devoted to teaching and not learning the rules, names, etc.	More guidance/training for mentor needed.
	Students can become overloaded with work (college and middle school).
They learn the real fun things like dress up days, bomb threats and parent conferences.	Want to volunteer to be mentor.
I grew from the experience as I learned a lot of new things that I didn't have access to before.	Can be a lot of extra work.
	It is a lot of work.
This program will weed out those people that aren't teaching material.	Fear of being assigned to a "bad" teacher and picking up those bad habits.
Ability to see other teachers in action and see the difference ways of dealing with situations.	Teacher won't share lesson plans.
Liked coming back to VSU to ask questions about problem areas or concerns.	Difficulty in complying with college requirements in the schools. Feel this can be an imposition on the teacher.
Being guided through situations by a person with experience. Not something you can learn in a college classroom.	Ownership problem (won't let the student do anything).
Feel more competent and confident.	Not everything the school does, works.

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